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P R O P O S A L S

FOR PRINTING BY SUBSCRIPTION

A NEW TRANSLATION

OF THE

I L I A D AND O D Y S S E Y

OF

H O M E R,

INTO BLANK VERSE,

By W. C O W P E R,

OF THE INNER TEMPLE, ESQ.

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S P E C I M E N.

PRIAM, admonish'd by message from Jupiter, that he should go forth into the Grecian camp, attended only by an herald, to redeem the body of Hector, under conduct of Mercury passes the guard safely, and arrives at the tent of Achilles. When the poem thus proceeds.

ENT'RING, amid them all, by all unseen,
Of height and size majestic, Priam stood.
He near approach'd Achilles, clasp'd his knees,
And kiss'd those fell and blood-accustom'd hands
That had destroy'd so many of his sons.
As when th' oppress'd, who hath in vengeance slain
Th' oppressor, flies for life, and enters th' house
Of some rich dweller in a distant realm,
All stand astonish'd at the sudden guest,
So gazed Achilles seeing Priam near,
And so stood all astonish'd, and his eyes
Each fix'd intent upon his fellow's face ;
But Priam kneel'd, and suppliant thus began.

Think on thy father full of days like me,
And standing upon th' utmost verge of life.
Oh godlike, great Achilles, He perchance
Hath trouble also, and sustaining wrong
May even now seek remedy, and find
No man to succour him in his distress.

Yet

Yet when he hears that his Achilles lives,
 Then is he glad, and ev'ry day hath hope
 That one day he shall see thy face again.
 But I am altogether most forlorn
 Whose noble sons, the flow'r of Troy, are fall'n.
 When Greece came hither I had fifty sons.
 Nineteen were children of one bed, the rest
 Born of my concubines. A num'rous house,
 But bloody war hath thinn'd it. One I had,
 One, more than all my sons the strength of Troy,
 Whom standing for his country thou hast slain,
 Hector ;—I ask deliv'rance of his corse ;
 Ransom inestimable waits without
 Which I have brought myself into your camp.
 Rev'rence the gods Achilles. Recollect
 Thy father ; let compassion of his years
 Plead much for mine. No man of all the earth
 Hath gone my length in woe, who draw the hand
 Close to my lips, the hand that slew my son.*

So Priam pray'd and ceas'd. Achilles, touch'd
 With pity of his absent Sire, ev'n felt
 A wish to weep. Softly he placed his hand
 On th' old man's hand, and push'd it gently away.
 Both wept. The father at the conqu'rors feet
 Wept largely for his son in battle slain,

And

* The original is susceptible of two interpretations, and may signify either that Priam laid his hand on the mouth of Achilles, as was the suppliants custom, or that he drew the hand of Achilles toward his own. I have preferred the latter sense as arguing a greater degree of humiliation on the part of Priam.



And for his Sire, Achilles, who by turns
 Deplor'd Patroclus also. Many a groan
 Both utter'd, such as fill'd the spacious tent.
 Achilles first was satiate. Tears had flaked
 His thirst to weep. He rose, and raised th' old
 man,
 Compassionating much his hoary head
 And his white beard, and kindly him bespake.

Pity thee? Oh what pangs must thou have borne!
 How hast thou dar'd to venture forth alone
 Into the Grecian camp, and to appear
 In presence of the man himself whose arm
 Hath slain so many of thy valiant sons?
 Thou hast an heart of iron, terror-proof.
 Come. Sit beside me. Let us, if we may,
 Great mourners both, bid sorrow sleep awhile.
 There is no profit of our sighs and tears.
 Affliction is man's lot. The gods, exempt
 From care themselves, have purpos'd care for man.
 Within the portal of Jove's courts are placed
 Two casks, one stored with evil, one with good,
 From which the god dispenses as he wills.
 For whom he mingles both, he leads a life
 Checquer'd alternately with good and ill.
 But if he give t' a man th' unmingled cup
 Of bitterness, he makes that man a curse,
 His name becomes a by-word and reproach,
 His strength is hunger-bitten, and he walks
 The blessed earth, unblest, go where he may.
 Ev'n so, the mighty Peleus at his birth

Was

Was gifted nobly of the gods ; his wealth
 Was more than any man's, and he was born
 Lord of the myrmydons, and though a man,
 Mere mortal man, had Thetis to his bride.
 What then ? He also hath his share of woe,
 Denied a son, to sit upon his throne.
 A son he hath, but he shall pass away
 And soon be found no more. Meanwhile, instead
 Of cherishing his father's age, he dwells
 At distant Troy, the scourge of thee and thine.
 So also thou, as I have heard, had'st once
 Wealth more than Lesbos, more than Phrygia,
 more
 Than th' whole broad Hellespont in all his ports.
 But with it all, thou hast received from heav'n
 This doom, that war and carnage without end
 Encompass yonder city where thou reign'st.
 Cease therefore from unprofitable tears
 That ere they raise thy son to life again
 Shall doubtless find fresh cause for which to flow.

Then Priam thus replied. Favor'd of Jove,
 Constrain me not. No seat is here for me
 While Hector lies cast out among the tents.
 Loose him, and loose him now, that these mine
 eyes
 May look upon my son. Accept a price
 Magnificent, which may'st thou long enjoy,
 And since my life was precious in thy fight,
 May'st thou revisit safe thy native land.

To

To whom Achilles low'ring and in wrath. *
 Haunt me no longer at a time like this
 With that harsh note. I mean to loose thy son,
 I am prepar'd to loose him. Thetis came
 Herself upon that errand, sent from Jove.
 Priam, I understand thee well. I know
 That under conduct of some god thou cam'st
 Into the Grecian camp. Without such aid,
 No living man, not ev'n in prime of youth,
 Had ventured hither. Such a guard as our's
 He should not easily elude, such gates,
 So massy, he should not easily unbar.
 Thou therefore vex me not in my distress,
 Lest I abhor to see thee in my tent;
 Lest borne beyond all bounds, I set at nought
 Thee, and thy pray'r, and the command of Jove.

ILIAD XXIV. v. 477.

* And wherefore was he angry?—It seems not very difficult to assign the reason. He had received Priam with a generosity truly heroic, had addressed him with a most respectful tenderness, had even taken pains to console him. He intended to dispel his fears, and to convince him by the kindness of his behaviour, that his petition was already granted. Priam's answer therefore mortified him. Instead of sitting, as he was desired to do, he peremptorily refused to sit. Instead of taking up the conversation where Achilles had dropped it, with the utmost impatience he repeats his suit, and presses him to release the body—*ταχιστα*—that very moment. Add to all this, that to grant the body of Hector upon ransom was by no means the choice of Achilles, but merely an act of constrained obedience to the will of Jupiter, and his anger will be sufficiently accounted for. The passage thus understood is truly beautiful. The paternal eagerness of Priam, and the quick feelings and fiery temper of Achilles could not have been more happily exemplified.

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THE READER has now seen a specimen of the Author's manner in this Translation, and must be sufficiently aware that he has to expect neither a language nor a versification purely modern. Homer lived in an age of such simplicity, that a stile of poetry in some degree plain and simple seems necessary to a just representation of him, and of the manners and characters that he describes. It may, perhaps, be truly affirmed of the diction and of the verse of our day, that what they have gained, the one in elegance, and the other in smoothness, they have lost in energy. But Homer is of all poets the most energetic. The Translator has therefore adopted that stile which of all others appeared to him the most favourable to his design. It is neither so modern as to be delicate, nor so antient as to be obsolete.

